DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 421 436 SO 029 084

AUTHOR Hare, Delmas E.
TITLE The Edicts of King Ashoka and Character Education: An Approach, Rationale, and Procedure. Fulbright-Hays Summer Seminars Abroad, 1997 (India).
SPONS AGENCY United States Educational Foundation in India.
PUB DATE 1997-00-00
NOTE 9p.; For other curriculum project reports by 1997 seminar participants, see SO 029 067-086. Seminar title: "India and the Ethos."
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Asian Studies; Childrens Literature; Cultural Awareness; *Culture; Elementary Secondary Education; Ethics; Foreign Countries; *Indians; Modern History; Multicultural Education; Non Western Civilization; Social Studies; Values; *World History
IDENTIFIERS Georgia; *India

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the Georgia law mandating character education and how India has addressed a similar situation with its diversity by using the "Jakarta Tales." These children's tales are Buddhist in origin, have clearly stated morals, but lack a distinct Buddhist doctrinal bent. The paper advocates that a similar orientation could be developed by building a character education program based upon India's "The Edicts of King Ashoka." The report describes how the Edicts could be presented, how they could be applied to the historical situation as well as the contemporary situation, and how they could be reformulated into final student projects. (EH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 421 436

The Edicts of King Ashoka and Character Education: An Approach, Rationale, and Procedure.

Fulbright-Hays Summer Seminars Abroad, 1997 (India)

by

Delmas E. Hare

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Curriculum Projects Developed by 1997
Seminar Participants

Submitted to
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), USDE

SO 029 084

by United States Educational Foundation in India

The Edicts of King Ashoka and Character Education

An Approach, Rationale, and Procedure

Submitted by
Delmas E. Hare, Ph. D.
2064 West Mercer Avenue
College Park, Georgia

Fulbright Seminar Abroad
India: Understanding Her Ethos
Monday, December 15, 1997

The Edicts of King Ashoka and Character Education
An Approach, Rationale, and Procedure

I. Background

The State of Georgia in the United States has recently passed legislation requiring character education in all of Georgia's public schools. While this follows a recent trend in the United States, character education--sometimes called values education or moral education[1]--is commonplace in Asia. Schools in Japan and Korea, for example, have moral education programs based on some religious structure or tradition. In Korea schools started by Christians are now in large part government supported, yet teach morals and ethics based on traditional Christian teachings and values. In Japan, the National Shinto Moral Education, which gave support to the nationalism leading to the Second World War and supported the sacrifices it demanded, has been changed, but Shinto underlies Japanese moral education in spite the claim that Shinto has no ethical or moral system. In a word, each of these moral education programs are based on a tradition accepted by the general population served by schools.

Unlike Korea and Japan, India has a serious problem to overcome in developing a moral education program. Officially a secular state, India is, for all practical purposes a Hindu one. Laws, observations, the ruling elite, and life in general is more or less Hindu. Nonetheless, the history of India over the past half century is filled with religious conflict. Religious wars and persecution have frequently pitted one group of Indians against another. Given this situation, religious minorities are zealous in the protection of their religious practices and beliefs.

India's so eagerly sought unity in diversity is more evident by its absence than its presence. A simple illustration of the overwhelming Handiness of India is found the regard to a common greeting. Indians--Hindus--and the guidebooks assure travelers that the universally accepted and appreciated greeting in India is the Hindu *namaste* variously translated as "I salute, bow before, acknowledge greet, recognize the divine in you." This idea is o prevalent that in contemporary Indian literature *namaste* has been changed into a verb as in "After I *namasted him* . . . ." However, talking with Orthodox Christians in Kerela soon proves the guidebooks are wrong. These Christians never greet

---

[1] Except where the opposite is obvious, the terms moral education, values education, and character education are assumed to be interchangeable.

each other with *namaste* and do not respond to it with the standard slight bow, hands together, *namaste*.

Given the very volatile religious situation in India, India education has, in most cases, chosen to use a non-Hindu religious tradition as the basis for moral education, but one which, because of its characteristics, can be accepted by most Indians. Indian moral education is, in a great many cases, based on the *Jakarta Tales*. Buddhist in origin, these children's tales have clearly stated morals, but lack a distinct Buddhist doctrinal bent. This coupled with the fact Buddhism is essentially a lost religion in most of India means it is of little or no threat to other religions.[2] Further, Hindus frequently place Buddha within the pantheon of incarnations of the gods and, therefore, find no offense in the stories.

An approach to moral education in the United States must overcome many problems because of the lack of unity in the diversity of American democracy. As India, the United States has a dominant religious tradition, Christianity. Yet, the American disunity is found, primarily, within that dominant group rather than between supposedly diverse groups. While most citizens of he United States call themselves Christians, they are divided into many denominations, many of which believe themselves to be the true or orthodox group. Christians are separated by theology, ethnic origins, traditions, and practices. This reality has resulted in the very words moral education or values education becoming an invitation to heated debate.

Additionally, the United States has always had minorities who were not Christian. From the beginning there has been a small, but significant Jewish population. In recent years, the influx of Asian immigrants has brought enough Buddhists to the country to make their presence felt and Hindu temples are found in most major cities. The 1960s and 70s created movements concerned with the constitutionally assured freedom of religion. These ranged from groups seeking to make legal the outlawed Native American/American Indian religions which frequently included the use of hallucinogens such as peyote to others who desired assurance of their freedom *from* religion.

---

[2] This is very evident when visiting the Deer Park near Sarnatha where the Buddha preached his first sermon. There is a relatively new Buddhist temple there presided over by a monk from Sri Lanka. The Bodhi tree there is from a cutting from a tree in Ceylon grown from a cutting from the tree under which the Buddha receive Enlightenment. Today, Buddhism is found primarily in the areas bordering Nepal and Tibet. The number of Buddhists in India have increased significantly in recent years due to the influx of refugees from Tibet including His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

As these changes, positions, beliefs, and practices were coming to the forefront, the United States was also becoming a litigious society. Thus, to raise the questions of moral education was an answer a lawyer's dream. Yet, parents, civic, and business leaders were all calling for something to stem the erosion of the moral fiber of the nation. State legislatures and school boards have been quick to mandate character education (a new designation since moral education and values education are tainted phrases), but, in general, have failed to provide a program or guidelines. Other than stating that they may not support a particular religion, Georgia's lawyer-dominated legislature has simply dictated that all schools will begin a program of character education in the 1996-97 school year. India's experience suggests that the use of a religiously neutral approach be used in the United States. It is against this background that such a program is proposed.

II. The Proposal

India, in spite of its diversity and religious controversy, has been able to maintain a program of moral education which rests on a religious tradition, but which is not tied to it. While the program is essentially based on Buddhist tales, it is, in a real sense, religiously neutral while teaching commonly accepted moral standards. Learning from India's experience, and borrowing from her history, a character education program based upon *The Edicts of King Ashoka* is hereby proposed.

III. The Rationale

The rationale for using *The Edicts of King Ashoka* rests upon several factors:

a) the antiquity of the edicts and the unusual nature of their promulgation, i.e., the pillars and engraved stones, are a positive factor in engaging student interest,

b) while the texts come from a Buddhist background and perspective, doctrinal elements are absent or so subdued as to be inoffensive,

c) the edicts are not simply abstract rules, but concrete, relating to everyday life,

d) as political and social documents, the edicts connect with social and political life of any period, including the present,

e) most importantly, the edicts reflect a moral stance accepted by civilized people regardless of race, religion, nationality, or age.

IV. Procedure

A. Historical Setting

To make King Ashoka and his edicts come alive, information on the king, his history, and the era should be explored. This could take the form of illustrated lectures, student reports, research projects, and other ways provide means through which students may learn of the man and his time. An invaluable resource and logical starting point is *The Edicts of King Ashoka*. An electronic edition of the English rendering of the edicts by Ven. S. Dhammika is offered for free distribution by DharmaNet and is currently available on the world wide web at http:// www.cs.colostate. edu/ ~malaiya/ ashoka. html. In addition to the text of the edicts, the electronic edition contains a preface, introduction, limited notes, and a bibliography. It also contains a few illustrations. Additional illustrations can be found at other web sites as well as in books, especially travel guides.

B. Presentation of the Edicts

The nature of the edicts are such that they are repetitious. This is to be expected since they are really texts of laws to be distributed throughout a kingdom rather than local and localized regulations. Because of this, an edict may occur, more or less unchanged, in several locations. Such an edict would be a good starting point.

The edict should be presented without comment for the students to analyze and discuss. When students get too far off track, the teacher should remind them of the historical period, meaning of words, and the notes to get them back on track. Free use of slides, pictures, computer images as available should also inform the initial exploration of an edict. The objection of this phase is clarity on the edict itself. Later edicts will be presented against the extensive background used for the first, but the use of multimedia aids should not be discarded after the opening presentation.

C. Application to the Historical Situation

Once students have clarity on the meaning of the edict, it is most likely to still be poorly grounded at best and completely abstract at worse. This is especially true in regard to the historical society which produced it. Students should be given time and materials to look closely at the historical period in which the edict was produced and seek to apply it concretely to the historical situations which would arise in King Ashoka's kingdom. This not only provides a flesh and blood quality to the abstract edicts, but also reinforces knowledge of an era in Indian history.

D. Application to the Contemporary Situation

The ultimate goal of the study of King Ashoka's edicts is not to learn about the edicts and their historical setting, but to do character

education. This must involve a translation of the edicts from one historical setting to another. In order to do this students may begin with an edict or edicts and seek contemporary situations in which the edict(s) would be violated. What would be the change made if the situation uncovered were brought under King Ashoka's edicts? What would the new situation look like? What character trait (moral value) would be the ruling factor in changing the situation and maintaining a new one? Newspaper articles, magazines, television, movies, and popular music should all be examined in light of the edict. Specific events in the ongoing life of the school should also become grist for the mill of applying the edicts to contemporary situations.

E. Reformulating of the Edicts

After looking at the edicts in their historical setting and applying them to the contemporary world, students should re-write them. Keeping the character trait/moral value encoded in the original, students should reformulate the edicts in contemporary languages, metaphors, thought patterns, and world view. This provides an excellent opportunity for students to work in small groups. In such groups--unlike King Ashoka who could promulgate edicts by royal decree--students must reach a consensus on the form their version of the edicts will take.

V. A Concluding Project

Sixty ton engraved stone pillars are probably beyond the time, talent, and resources of high school students. However, their efforts in formulating their edicts should be followed by some way of promulgating them. The following are suggestions of how this may be done.

A. A "Stone" Pillar

Creation of a "stone" pillar is an ambitious project, but one within the talents and abilities of high school students. The first step is the creation of a pillar made from concrete, sand, and vermiculite (expanded mica) This mixture creates a durable material with a stone-like appearance, but one which is soft enough to be carved. Art teachers have formulas for making the material since it is often used in schools for sculpture classes. Further, the art teacher can help in providing carving tools, explaining carving techniques, and in preservation of the pillar.

B. A "Marble" Pillar

Faux marble is found throughout the United States. In fact, the famous marble entrance hall of the Smithsonian Institute is done in faux marble. Instructions describing the tools and techniques for creating faux

marble are found in many 'do it yourself' books, in magazine articles, and complete kits for the process are sold in home supply stores.

The pillar can be constructed from plyboard or lumber if a square column is desired or a more expensive, prefabricated round column can be purchased. The column is transformed into faux marble. Once the marbling process is complete, the edict is painted on in a contrasting color. A polyurethane coat is applied to seal the column. If the column is to be erected outside, a second coat of urethane is advised. While a square column may have a capitol, the round column would lend itself to capital based on the four lions of Ashoka's columns.

C. A "Sandstone" Wall

Since the edicts are being translated for today, a wall in the school lobby would allow more students to view them than a column. To maintain some connection with their Indian past, a reddish brown background prepared by paint mixed with fine sand would suggest the famous sandstone of India. Cream colored lettering would suggest the Mughal sandstone structures of India.

D. A Television Column

For a truly contemporary version of the edict columns, a sculpture holding old television sets connected to a tape loop of the students' edicts could be built. Old televisions no longer used in homes are generally available and a VCR with an endless tape should be easily secured.

VI. Conclusion

The Edicts of King Ashoka form the basis for a genuine human and humane ethic. They are as applicable today as they were when they were promulgated on stone pillars and boulders. The engagement of students with the edicts and their contemporary application will help students evaluate, modify, and strengthen their own value system and ethic in order to make it more human and humane. Further, the final project provides a way of engaging a whole school in questions of morals and values.